

Contact us



Seattle City Council 2012 Budget Guide

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Thank you for being part of the 2012 budget review process!

Designing a city budget is a mighty undertaking, one that requires a great deal of effort, a lot of time and – done right – careful ordering of priorities and input from citizens.

It is with this in mind that we created this budget guide book. We want to help citizens better understand the budget, the sometimes choppy process we go through and offer tips on how to successfully influence the process by talking with Councilmembers or speaking at public hearings.

Seattle's actual budget document is the size of a city phone book, and is a candid picture of the city's priorities and a road map for the future.

We hope you will join us on the journey. Passage of a budget is too important to leave to just a few – it takes a village – and part of that village is you.

Richard Conlin
Seattle City Council President

Jean Godden
Finance & Budget Committee Chair

What is the Council's role?

The council is the legislative branch of city government and in this role it considers proposed legislation and sets over-arching city policy. We consider the Mayor's proposed budget and CIP, modifying the authorized spending to match the council's policy priorities.

Before making any changes to the Proposed Budget, the council seeks input from the public. The public has the opportunity to provide direct testimony at public hearings and/or before meetings of the city's Budget Committee. Councilmembers also welcome input via e-mail, phone and one-on-one meetings.

The budget process is built around three key components

The Revenue Forecast

The city must operate within a balanced budget, meaning that the spending cannot exceed expected revenues. As a result, the forecast of revenues for the upcoming year defines how much funding is allocated within the budget. The initial revenue forecast is presented with the proposed budget, but must be modified if economic conditions or other factors alter the city's revenue expectations.

The Operating Budget

The city's operating budget allocates funding for all city departments, including the city's public utilities. In 2011, this budget totaled approximately **\$4 billion**.

The Capital Improvement Program

Each year the city adopts a six-year capital plan that forecasts capital spending for each of the city's departments. The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is a separate document prepared in conjunction with the budget.

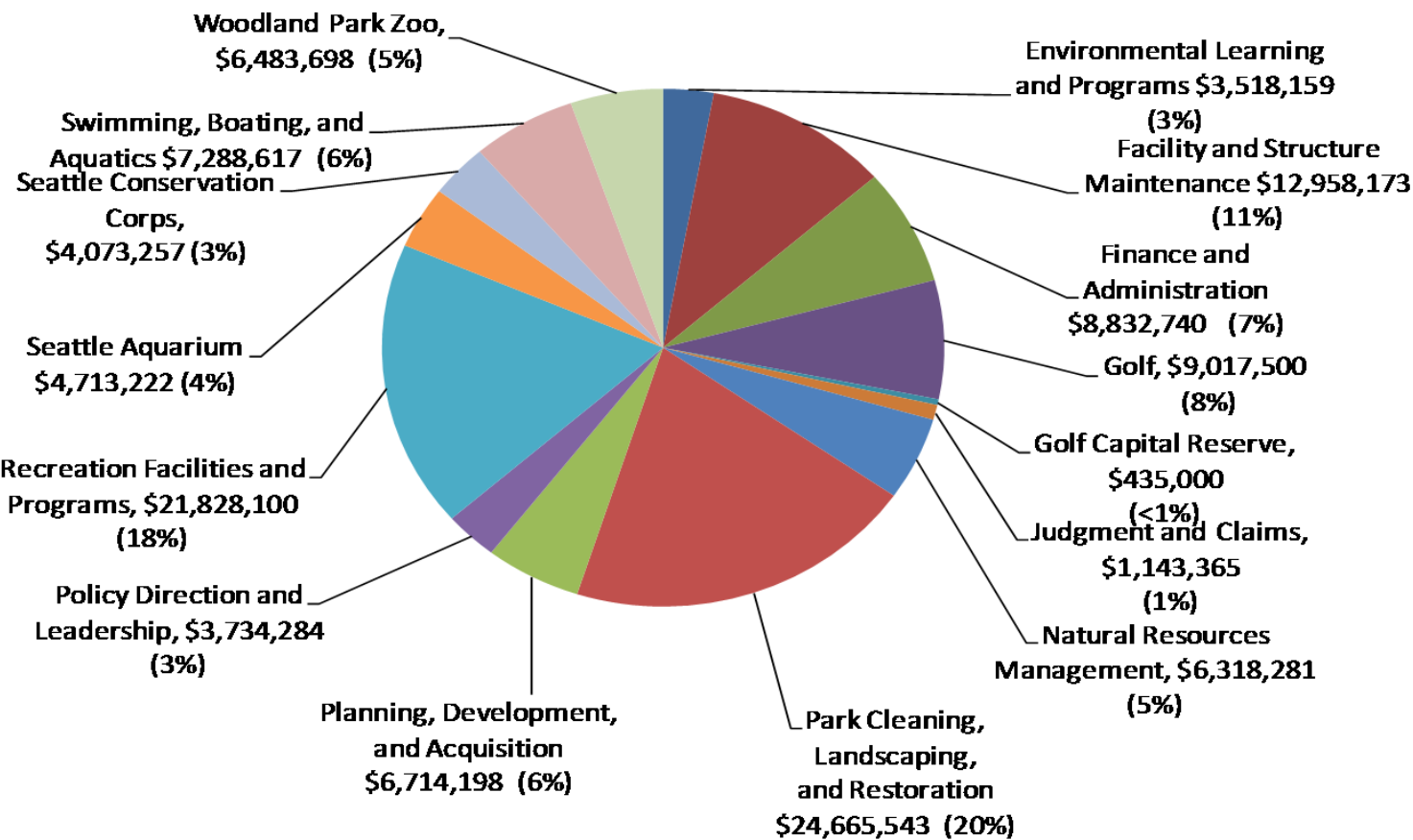
Where does the money come from?

The City of Seattle has a general operating budget of about \$4 billion. This revenue comes from basic city taxes, such as property and retail sales tax, business tax, utility fees, state and federal funding, and voter-approved property tax levies.

The source of the revenue determines where those funds can be allocated. For example, the basic city taxes fund basic city functions such as police, fire, parks, and human services. The city’s utility services, including electricity, water, sewer and garbage collection, are operated as legally independent public “companies” and do not share their revenues with other parts of city government. Some of the state and federal funding is flexible, but most of it can only be used for specific purposes.

The voters of Seattle have approved several property tax measures that raise funds for specific purposes. These levies include: the Families and Education Levy; the Housing Levy; the Parks Levy; the Pike Place Market Levy; and the Bridging the Gap Transportation Levy.

Department of Parks & Recreation Operating Appropriations Total 2011 Adopted Budget : \$121.7 million



Supporting your program

The city is often interested in supporting neighborhood initiatives and projects, but resources are limited and the city simply cannot fund all worthy projects. Within these constraints, the following suggestions may prove helpful in seeking assistance from the city.

- **Start early**
- **Use a fact-based argument**
- **State your goals clearly**
- **Show broad-based support for your project or program**
- **Link your request to a neighborhood plan or to a council priority**
- **Show support from other sources**
- **Review existing programs first for support from existing program resources**
- **Be ready to offer suggestions for other reduction or savings and identify trade-offs**

Spring community conversations

Balancing our city’s budget in tough times requires a great deal of direction, constructive input and the careful ordering of priorities.

As you provide input today, please try and stay on the topic of these community budget conversations. The following questions will guide our discussion.

- **Do you have any ideas or suggestions for cost saving measures citywide?**
- **Do you have any ideas or suggestions for cost saving measures for your specific department?**
- **What City services do you use?**
- **What services do you believe are important to maintain?**
- **What services do you believe can be reduced?**
- **Do you have any comments/suggestions for upcoming public meetings?**

Budget timeline

- **April - May:**
Departments work with the City Budget Office to establish baseline budgets and identify priorities.
- **May - June:**
Working with the City Budget Office, departments develop “Budget Issue Papers” describing potential changes to the baseline budget.
- **July - September:**
Mayor reviews budget issue papers, reconciles these with revised revenue estimates and submits a balanced budget to the council by the end of September.
- **October - November:**
Council reviews the Mayor’s proposed budget, considers potential changes and passes a balanced budget by no later than December 1.